

This week's community profile: Slab City



Bar talk: Ruthie Hancock talks with two of her customers in The Morgue, one of two taverns in

Slab City. Hancock is co-owner of the tavern known for its pool room coffin.

It's a bed and coffin kind of town

By Gary Dodge

Press-Gazette

SLAB CITY — When people make their beds here they make them fast.

That's important every September when modified beds roll down the Old Wisconsin 47 hill at speeds reaching 40-50 mph.

Press-Gazette photos by Sandee Gerbers

Sept. 14, say Roger and Mayville Boettcher, owners of the Welcome Inn, which organizes the event.

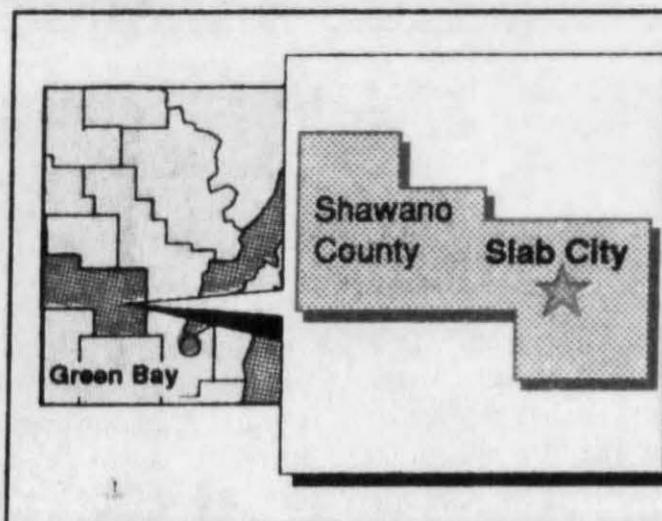
Who rides on the beds?

"Somebody with lots of guts," says Ruthie Hancock, 44, co-owner of The Morgue, the other tavern in town. The beds are designed so the rider can steer and stop them, she says.

Beds without decent brakes take their passengers splashing into Slab City Creek.

This hillside community is in the Shawano County town of Hartman a mile south of Bonduel on Wisconsin 47.

While the bed races attract hordes of spectators every year, Hancock says The Morgue is a year-round tourist attraction. People walk through the black coffin-shaped door and up a flight of stairs that leads into a tavern with a black ceil-



ing and a black pine box in a corner.

Most curiosity-seekers fill the back pool room where Hancock has a coffin on the floor.

"A lot of people go back and jump in; others stay away," Hancock says. Many people get their picture taken in the coffin, she says.

She gave the tavern its name about 19 years ago. "It seemed like a good name for a tavern in Slab City. Not everyone liked it but it finally went over."

"My kids answer the phone, 'You stab 'em, we slab 'em,'" Hancock says.

In its heyday, Slab City had a grocery store, blacksmith shop, hotel and dance hall, saw mills and lime kiln operation, says John Krueger, 65, Route 1, Bonduel, who lives on the property where the Slab

The Slab City file

- Population: About 50.
- What's in a name: The unincorporated community was named from wood slabs produced by three or four sawmills, John Krueger says.
- Turning point: Slab City would be bigger than nearby Bonduel if the Chicago & North Western Transportation Co. tracks ran through Slab City, Krueger says. A route in the Pulaski and Zachow areas was chosen.

City School once stood.

A gravel pit operated by Bonduel Sand and Gravel Inc., and Slab City Concrete Inc., replaced the sawmills and lime kiln as the major business, says JoAnn Leisner, an employee.

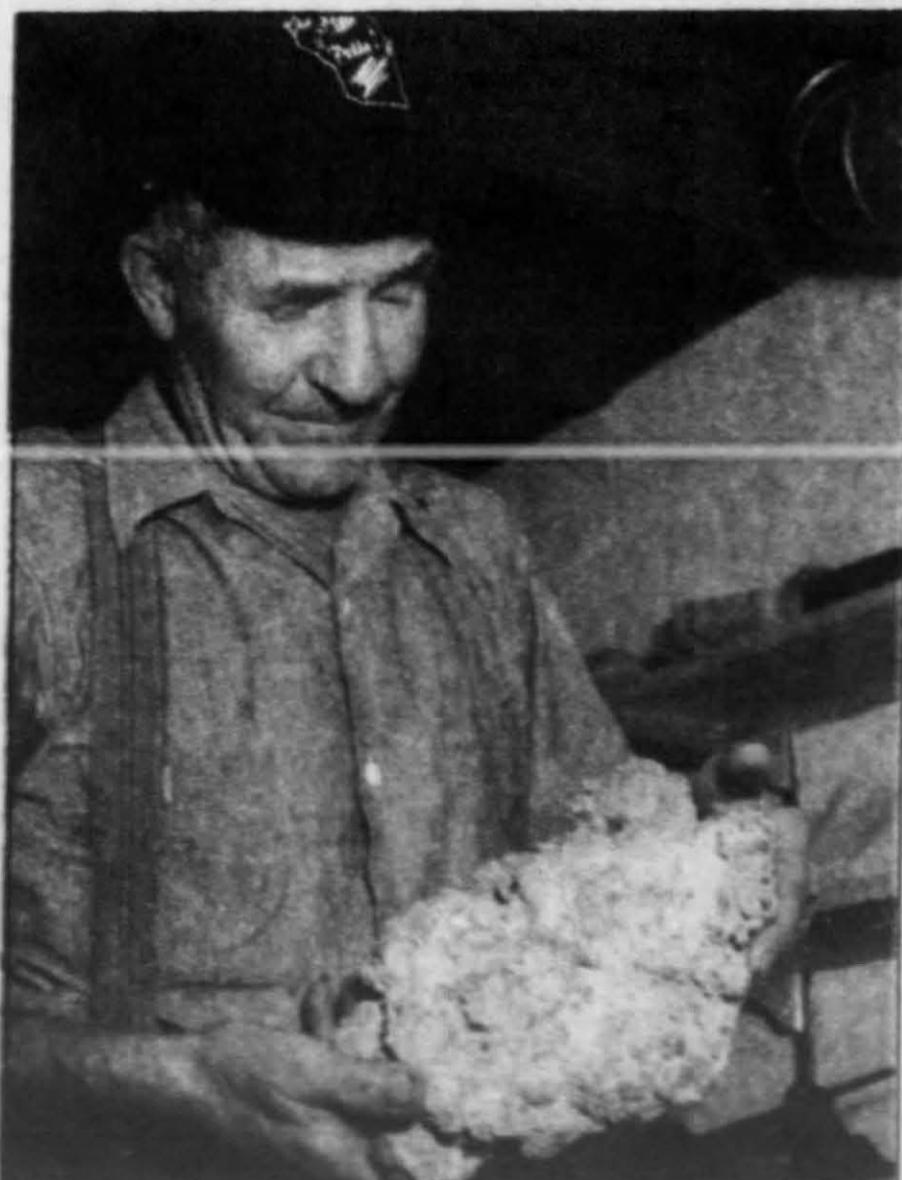
Another well-known business is Laura Wussow's maple syrup operation.

Wussow, 78, still cooks the maple syrup each spring using an evaporator at her home on top of Slab City Road hill.

"We cooked day and night," she says.

She and her son, Dale, buy sap from area residents and make about 350 gallons a year. The syrup is shipped to other parts of the state.

■ Next week: Little Rapids in Brown County



From space: John Krueger holds a meteorite he found below ground in a Slab City gravel pit.



Sweet work: Laura Wussow arranges maple syrup in her Slab City wood shed.